



# Oxford University

Humanities and Social Sciences at  
Oxford

# There's no single Oxford 'skill set'

Some core abilities:

- Linguistic
- Literary
- Philosophical
- Mathematical and statistical

*All the degrees are very demanding, and may be challenging in a number of these areas*

# **‘Single Honours’ Courses...**

- History
- English
- Law
- Music
- Theology

... and others, but there are a number of subjects that can't be studied on their own.

# **‘Joint Honours’ Courses**

Many degrees are joint between two or more subjects, for example:

- History and Politics
- Philosophy and Theology
- Classics and Modern Languages

But *we only offer the degrees advertised*

(So, no 'Music and Modern Languages', and no 'Philosophy and English')

# Joint courses with Science

Various combinations of Humanities/  
Social Sciences with science subjects,  
for example:

- Materials, Economics and Management
- Psychology, Philosophy and Linguistics
- Mathematics and Philosophy

# Why study the subject at Oxford?

- If the course looks right.
- If the approach to teaching, emphasizing independent learning and close contact with senior academics, suits, and is even a major attraction. (It doesn't suit everyone.)
- If the opportunity to live in an academic community dedicated to serious study across a range of disciplines is attractive.

Candidates will be assessed against their suitability for the course and for our style of teaching. Simply having very good examination results at school or college won't be enough.

# Proportions of international applicants

In PPE there were 1726 applicants in 2011; 427 from the European Union outside the UK, and 494 from outside the EU. That's over 53% of all applicants; most were school-leavers.

In Theology, Philosophy and Theology, and Theology and Oriental Studies, taken together there were 205 applicants. Of those, 6 were from the EU and 20 from outside the EU – less than 13%, and many of those were mature applicants.

So, admissions procedures on at least *some* degrees need to place a strong emphasis on comparative testing for those with different school and college backgrounds.

# What are we looking for?

- Lively, enquiring, questioning minds
- Evidence of self-motivated reading and thinking beyond the boundaries of a set curriculum
- Clear, analytical minds
- A capacity for hard work, and a willingness to accept and work through intellectual challenges
- Interest in issues relevant to the chosen degree, and the capacity to discuss them dispassionately
- Clear written and spoken communication skills



# Admissions (1)

Bearing in mind the degrees we offer and how we teach for them, we aim simply to admit those with the best potential to succeed. Results in examinations to date tell us *something*, maybe quite a lot, but far less than all we'd like to know.

## **Admissions (2)**

One example: half of PPE applicants did GCSE examinations; half (but not exactly the same half!) are doing A levels. Most non-A level applicants will be on broader courses than A level, though not all of them; methods of examining and assessment will also vary. So even if being really good at examinations were a very large part of the story, not all applicants have the same examination background.

# Admissions (3)

That's part of the reason why we engage in other methods of assessment at admissions, beyond what appears on the UCAS form.

- Admissions tests
- Interviews

# Admissions tests

- Will typically be tests of aptitude; certainly not simple tests of existing knowledge
- Are designed to place a common standard across all applicants at the point of assessment for admissions
- Most are taken in school or college in November, before we select for interview
- Some (a small number) are taken as part of the interview process in December

# Selecting for interview

- Selection for interview uses *all* available information (all information on UCAS form, test results)
- In some subjects, more candidates are set aside at this stage than are eventually interviewed
- After selection for interview some subjects routinely organize interviews at a second college as well; others re-allocate a proportion of those called for interview to different colleges. This is to give all candidates the best chance of obtaining a place at Oxford

# The Interview

- Assessing aptitude and motivation for the course
- Not primarily a test of existing knowledge, but may test ability to use what has been studied at school
- A way of assessing how the interviewee could benefit from the tutorial system
- Likely to be challenging the interviewee at the limits of their abilities